

The Philippine Village Voice®

THE TIME TO BE HEARD IS NOW.

• LINKING AMERICA'S FILIPINO COMMUNITIES •



WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS at his side, US President George W. Bush signs the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 in the Oval Office Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2003. The act expands the benefits program worth \$16.3 million for about 8,000 US-based veterans and their surviving spouses.

US-Based Fil-Am Vets Get Benefits

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A victory celebration was held at the Philippine Embassy on Monday night (Dec. 8) hailing President George Bush's signing into law of the Veterans Health Care Act of 2003. It provides health care benefits for approximately 8,000 US-based Filipino veterans, the funding for which amounts to US \$ 16.3 million.

Philippine Ambassador to the US Albert del Rosario said that "this key legislation represents a major milestone in our ongoing struggle to secure eventual full equity for our brave Filipino veterans of World War II."

He described the "moral leadership of President Bush

and his Veterans Benefits team headed by Secretary Anthony J. Principi" as "exemplary" and thanked President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who "stood steadfast for our veterans" and who "raised their cause in every discussion with President Bush."

The envoy also paid "special tribute to our friends, advocates and champions in the US Congress" as well as to "state and local officials" who "never broke faith with our veterans." He enjoined everyone to work together to ensure that funding for the legislation is provided.

Ambassador del Rosario added that the 22,000 sur-

living veterans of World War II who live under great difficulty in the Philippines and who remain disadvantaged also "deserve justice and equity." He stressed, "it behooves us to work even harder for them."

Eric Lachica, Executive Director of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans (ACFV) thanked President Bush, President Arroyo, Ambassador del Rosario, Secretary Principi, the veterans and members of the Filipino-American community for the enactment into law of the veterans health care bill. At the same time, he emphasized the urgency of lobbying vigorously for full equity for Filipino veterans based in the Philippines.

Representing the Bush administration during the event was Gordon Mansfield who has been nominated as Veterans Affairs Assistant Secretary.